United Nations

Centre against Apartheid

Notes and Documents

19/90 November 1990

CHURCH LEADERS IN SOUTH AFRICA PLEDGE THEMSELVES TO THE RESTITUTION OF LAND AND A COMMITMENT TO PEACE, DEMOCRACY AND JUSTICE FOR A NON-RACIAL SOUTH AFRICA

[Note: This issue contains the Rustenburg Declaration, adopted at the end of a five-day National Conference of Church Leaders in South Africa, held at Rustenburg, South Africa, from 5 to 9 November 1990.]

90-33548

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United Nations, New York 10017

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THE RUSTENBURG DECLARATION

PREAMBLE

We, 230 representatives of 80 denominations and 40 organizations participating in the National Conference of Church Leaders in South Africa, have come together at Rustenburg, South Africa, in the belief that it is under the authority of God's word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We have been convinced anew of God's amazing grace by the way in which, despite our wide variety of backgrounds, we have begun to find one another and to discover a broad consensus through worship, prayer, confrontation, confession and costly forgiveness. We have sought a spirit of patience, mutual care and openness as we have tried to discern the mind of Christ and have often been surprised at how our views on many issues have converged. Some of us are not in full accord with everything said in this Conference, but on one thing we are all agreed, namely the unequivocal rejection of apartheid as a sin. We are resolved to press forward in fellowship and consultation towards a common mind and programme of action.

Coming from diverse Christian traditions, histories, political persuasions and cultural backgrounds, we engaged midst joy and pain, love and suspicion, in a process of soul-searching and wrestling with the theological and socio-political complexities of our country. In the process, we had a strong sense that God was at work among us. We became aware that he was surprising us by his grace which cut through our fears and apprehension. We give praise to this liberating God, who is forever faithful in visiting his people in their hour of need.

I. CONTEXT

1. The Conference met at a critical time of transition in our country. We thank God that we are already in a period of gestation with the hope of a democratic, peaceful and just dispensation emerging for our nation. Yet many people are continuing to suffer immensely under ongoing structures of injustice. Recent months have also seen the upsurge of violence in many areas and much brutalizing of innocent people. There is also extensive alienation among young blacks and a seemingly interminable crisis in black education. Unemployment has reached alarming proportions. The crisis in our land has also been aggravated by grossly inadequate housing in the black community.

All this is leading to the social and economic disintegration of our society.

2. We believe, however, that we stand on the threshold of new things. There appears to be the possibility of a new dispensation and the promise of reconciliation between South Africans as some of our black and white leaders prepare to negotiate together for a new and liberated nation of equity and justice. In this context Christians are called to be a sign of hope from God, and to share a vision of a new society, which we are prepared to strive for and, if needs be, suffer for.

3. We acknowledge that this hope will elude us unless we can break completely with the past. Accordingly, we make the following confession.

II. CONFESSION

4. While in this document we focus attention on apartheid, we recognize that there are many other sins in our society that call for repentance.

5. As representatives of the Christian Church in South Africa, we recognize that the South African situation owes much to the content of Western colonialism, to the stifling of conscience by inherited social attitudes, which blind communities to the wrong they reflect and to a weakness common to the world-wide church in dealing with social evil. Now, however, we confess our own sin and acknowledge our heretical part in the policy of apartheid which has led to such extreme suffering for so many in our land. We denounce apartheid, in its intention, its implementation and its consequences, as an evil policy. The practice and defence of apartheid as though it were biblically and theologically legitimated in an act of disobedience to God, a denial of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and a sin against our unity in the Holy Spirit.

6. We remember with sorrow the victims of apartheid who have suffered and continue to suffer humiliation, dispossession and death. We pay tribute to those who have stood resolutely for justice and cared for the oppressed.

7. We know that without genuine repentance and practical restitution we do not appropriate God's forgiveness and that without justice true reconciliation between people is impossible. We also know that this process must begin with a contrite church.

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8. We therefore confess that we have in different ways practised, supported, permitted or refused to resist apartheid:

(a) Some of us actively misused the Bible to justify apartheid, leading many to believe that it had the sanction of God. Later, we insisted that its motives were good even though its effects were evil. Our slowness to denounce the sin of apartheid encouraged the Government to retain it;

(b) Some of us ignored apartheid's evil, spiritualizing the Gospel by preaching the sufficiency of individual salvation without social transformation. We adopted an allegedly neutral stance, which in fact resulted in complicity with apartheid. We were often silent when our sisters and brothers were suffering persecution;

(c) Some of us were bold in condemning apartheid but timid in resisting it. Some churches failed to give effective support to courageous individuals at the forefront of protest against evil. We spoke out for justice but our own church structures continued to oppress. We blamed other churches and were blind to our own inconsistencies.

9. Those of us who have perpetuated and benefited from apartheid are guilty of a colonial arrogance towards black culture. We have allowed State institutions to do our sinning for us. In our desire to preserve the Church we have sometimes ceased to be the Church. We have often been more influenced by our ideologies than by Christ's Gospel. We have continued to move in separate worlds while claiming to be one body. We have insulated ourselves from the pain of black Christians. By failing sufficiently to challenge the violence of apartheid and its enforcement, we have permitted a culture of violence in which our people believe that force is the only way to deal with any dispute. Human life has become cheap. By our faltering witness we have allowed families to be broken, children to go uneducated and millions of people to be denied work. We have erected economic systems based on race. By our disunity and disrespect for other people's beliefs and opinions we have encouraged a fragmented and intolerant society. Most of all, we have been unwilling to suffer, loving our comfort more than God's justice and clinging to our privilege rather than binding ourselves to the poor and oppressed of our land.

10. Those of us who are the victims of apartheid acknowledge our own contribution to the failure of the Church. While colonialism and oppression have damaged our self-esteem and eroded the fibers of ubuntu (humanness) that held our communities together, we

acknowledge that many of us have responded with timidity and fear, failing to challenge our oppression. Instead, we have acquiesced in it and accepted an inferior status. Some of us have become willing instruments of the repressive State machinery. Others have reacted to oppression with a desire for revenge. Many of us who have achieved privilege have exploited others. An indifference to suffering has crept into our communities, often leading to the ostracism of those who have stood courageously for justice and truth. Some of us have failed to be instruments of peace in a situation of growing intolerance of ideological differences. Others of us have also neglected our calling to contribute to the theological renewal of the Church.

11. Those of us who are male confess that we have often disregarded the human dignity of women and ignored the sexism of many of our church, social, political, economic and family structures. By limiting the role and ministry of women - as was reflected in this Conference - we have impoverished the Church. We have been insensitive to the double oppression suffered by black women under sexism and apartheid.

12. We confess that we have prevented youth from full participation in the life of the church and have ignored the issues facing youth. We acknowledge with sorrow that apartheid has brutalized young people and turned youth against youth in conflict.

13. Therefore, in these and other ways, all the representatives at this Conference confess that we have often let the world rather than the Gospel mould us and we have served our selfish interests rather than Christ.

14. With a broken and contrite spirit we ask the forgiveness of God and of our fellow South Africans. We call upon the members of our churches to make this confession their own. We call upon the Government of South Africa to join us in a public confession of guilt and a statement of repentance for wrongs perpetrated over the years.

III. DECLARATION

15. To the Church of Jesus in South Africa, we address an appeal to adopt our confession and pledge itself to restitution. We call for an end to racial disparities in clergy remuneration; to deploy clergy without regard to colour or social status; and to end all discrimination within the church on the basis of sex or race. We call upon church leaders to carry the confessions and

commitments of this Declaration into the life of every congregation in the country.

16. To the nation, we declare the compelling necessity for all to renounce and turn from personal, economic, social and political sin, most especially the sin of racism in both our souls and our structures. We call upon every South African to be involved positively in nation-building.

17. To political leaders, we express appreciation for the progress made thus far and we address an appeal that you meet urgently to negotiate a new and just order for our country. We call upon the Government to repeal as a matter of urgency all apartheid laws, such as the Land Act and the Group Areas, Population Registration, Homelands, Black Local Authorities, Black Education and Internal Security Acts. We also call for the granting of unconditional indemnity to political exiles, the immediate release of all political prisoners and the return of property confiscated from previously banned organizations. We assure all leaders of our prayers in these historic and demanding tasks.

18. To the world-wide church, we declare gratitude for loving care, confrontation, prayer, support and solidarity over many years. We ask you all to continue to stand with us.

IV. AFFIRMATION

19. We affirm and highlight the following:

(a) Justice:

(i) The Bible reveals God as a God of compassionate love who has a special care for the sinner, the downtrodden, the poor and all who suffer injustice. Obedience to Christ therefore requires that we develop an economic system based on justice, compassion and co-responsibility, so that those in need benefit more than those who have more than they need. More equitable wealth distribution must go hand in hand with economic growth;

(ii) After decades of oppression, the removal of discriminatory laws will have to be accompanied by affirmative acts of restitution in the fields of health care,

psychological healing, education, housing, employment, economic infrastructure and, especially, land ownership. For many years, greed has led to the taking of land from the poor and the weak. Both church and State must address the issue of restoring land to dispossessed people.

(b) Church and State:

(i) In the past we have often forfeited our right to address the State by our own complicity in racism, economic and other injustice and the denial of human rights. We also recognize that in our country the State has often co-opted the church. The church has often attempted to seek protection for its own vested interests from the State. Our history compromises our credibility in addressing church-State issues;

(ii) We therefore commit ourselves to the struggle for a just, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist South Africa so that our witness may carry greater credibility when we address church-State relations in the new dispensation;

(iii) Our highest loyalty as Christians is always to God. The State is always under God, its power is limited and it is a servant for good, first to God and then impartially to all the people it represents. We therefore ask that the separation of church and State, the necessity for the freedom to believe, practice and propagate religion, and freedom of association be guaranteed equally to all;

(iv) On the basis of biblical and ethical values, we call upon those negotiating a new South African constitution to respect the following principles in the constitution:

a. The preciousness and value of human life created in the image of God;

b. The exclusion of all racial, gender, class and religious discrimination in the implementation of justice;

c. The acceptance of the rule of law under an independent judiciary;

d. The entrenchment of a bill of rights subject to the judiciary alone, noting the Christian conviction that basic human rights are God-given and not, therefore, conferred or removable by any State;

e. The establishment of a democratic elective process based on one-person, one-vote on a common voters' role, in a multiparty democracy in a unitary State;

f. The sincere commitment to employment, housing, education, health and welfare for all South Africans;

g. The limiting of the power of the security machinery of the State, including the police, for the protection of the population;

h. The embodiment of the right of individuals or religious groups to preserve and protect the moral values that affect marriage, family life and, in particular, moral norms. We express particular concern for the protection of children from abuse. This should be available to all religious groups in terms of their life and world view;

(v) Further, we call for the negotiation of a new constitution by a body clearly and fully representative of all South Africans. We ask the Government to discuss with other political parties the setting up of a form of administration or government that will ensure that the interests of all South Africans are adequately represented in the transitional period until a new constitution has been agreed upon;

(c) Peace:

(i) In both the Old and New Testaments God's peace or shalom speaks of a comprehensive wholeness and rightness in all relationships, including those between God and his people, between human and human and between humans and creation. In South Africa peace and shalom are shattered, not only by personal but also by social and structural sin. The consequences are devastating: racial alienation, mistrust, humiliation, exploitation of humans and the environment, privation of basic needs, denial of self worth. Perhaps most devastating has been the emergence of a social climate in which violence and death rather than co-operation and life have become the norm;

(ii) The causes of violence include, inter alia:

a. Decades of exploitation of black workers, leading to the creation of desperate economic inequities;

b. The denial of full political rights to most South Africans;

c. The resulting struggle by black South Africans against an oppressive white political system, culminating in violence becoming the norm for political response;

d. The apparent emergence of "third forces" dedicated to sowing confusion;

e. Poverty, inter-group rivalry and competition for limited resources;

f. Power struggles between some political parties;

g. The uprooting of families from their traditional homes, leading to the breakdown of family structures and parental authority;

h. The resulting spiritual problems;

i. Spiritual principalities and powers of evil active across the human spectrum;

(iii) We need to respond to the violence by:

a. Mobilizing church agencies to help collect evidence about violence and to present it to the authorities and political organizations;

b. Condemning the perpetrators of all forms of violence;

c. Supporting victims materially and spiritually;

d. Encouraging all South Africans to enter the process of negotiations, with conditions of safety to facilitate this being fully ensured;

e. Praying for the cessation of violence and the speedy social, economic and political transformation of the land;

f. Convening a task force to co-ordinate church strategies;

g. Calling a peace conference to bring together leaders who can help end violence;

(d) <u>Spirituality, mission and evangelism</u>:

The work and mission of the Church is a consequence of its worship, prayer, fellowship and spirituality. We commit ourselves to deepen these aspects of the practice of our faith. We resolve to fulfil the great commission and, by evangelistic faithfulness, to bring men and women to repentance and personal faith, new birth and salvation and to help them to work this out in a witness that engages the world. We recognize our need for the equipping fullness of the Holy Spirit's fruit and gifts and we call upon God's people to pray for spiritual renewal in the land.

V. RESTITUTION AND A COMMITMENT TO ACTION

20. Confession and forgiveness necessarily require restitution. Without it, a confession of guilt is incomplete.

21. As a first step towards restitution, churches must examine their land ownership and work for the return of all land expropriated from relocated communities to its original owners. "White" schools must be opened to people of all races and programmes of affirmative action must be embarked upon at all levels of black education.

22. We call for a national day of prayer for the purpose of acts of intercession, confession, forgiveness and reconciliation. We urge that these be accompanied by a declaration of intention to engage in a common witness to God's love and justice. The National Conference requests the formation of a liaison committee to plan such a day of prayer and to consider the recommendation of the "silent minute" concept.

23. The National Conference asks churches that own private schools to review their policy on such schools with a view to making them accessible to the underprivileged.

24. We request the Liaison Committee to provide study material for use by the churches seeking to equip members with a better understanding of their mission in a new South Africa.

25. The National Conference asks churches to make available financial and human resources to enable the work of reconstruction and renewal of South African society. It asks churches to co-operate in programmes for the welcoming and rehabilitation of such people.

26. The National Conference requests churches and organizations present to place on their agendas as a matter of urgency the following:

(a) The need to work towards a new economic order in which the needs of the poor can be adequately addressed;

(b) The provision of work for the unemployed;

(c) The provision of adequate homes and essential services for the poor;

(d) The need to work towards parity in the standards of living between black and white people;

(e) The need to eradicate poverty and hunger;

(f) Affirmative action to enable the transfer of some of the economic power presently in white hands;

(g) Affirmative action in relation to women's rights;

(h) The consideration of major health issues, e.g., acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

27. The National Conference authorizes the Steering Committee to pass any information it considers might be of interest to community organizations.

VI. CONCLUSION

28. We give thanks to God for past grace and faithfulness, by which he has seen fit to use so many of his people here, in spite of our many weaknesses and sins, to bear witness to his name, to proclaim his saving gospel and bring blessings to many, to labour for justice and to care for the poor, oppressed and needy. We give praise in our belief that in wrath he has remembered mercy. This being so we are enabled by his spirit to move forward together in his name and call others to do likewise so that the Kingdom of our God and his Christ may be extended far and wide both in our land and beyond. And so to that name which is above every name, even the name of Jesus, we ascribe all might, majesty, dominion and praise. Amen.

Courtesy of Centre against Apartheid